

Norton Offers Three Suggestions to Help relieve D.C. Crime - July 21, 2006

Norton Offers Three Suggestions for Concrete Help to
Relieve D.C. Crime with One Already Promised

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Washington, DC-- At a news conference today, Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) offered three recommendations that would have an effect on D.C. crime. She had written and had earlier discussions with Chairman Frank Wolf (R-VA), Chairman of the appropriations subcommittee that oversees the Office of the U.S. Attorney and he has committed to providing some personnel resources for crime investigators that would free D.C. Metropolitan Police from doing this work and result in more police in high crime areas. Congresswoman Norton's statement follows.

Because of the concern that brings us together, I want to get straight to the point. Chief Charles Ramsey and the District are right to make every effort by every legitimate means necessary to get a hold of a national crime spike that could easily get out of hand in the District of Columbia in particular. Residents know from the city's recent history that when crime in our neighborhoods goes up, crime has tended to stay up and stay up longer than in other jurisdictions nationwide. Residents where crime has been prevalent will particularly remember the height of the crack epidemic in the early 1990s. Yet, even then, crime did not spread to the Mall. Something different is happening today, putting not only residents but visitors and our economy at risk, and the time to understand it and do something about it is now. I therefore especially appreciate the way the federal agencies are assembling to indicate their support. However, only concrete resources and personnel support from the multitude of federal forces here can make a real difference.

Such an effort is not unprecedented. My statement points to two examples of federal-District coordination to prevent crime that Congress has already enacted. I have included them because they provide concrete evidence in existing legislation that Congress endorses and expects federal police resources to be available to combat crime in the District. The reason is obvious. Any serious attempt to prevent crime today or terrorist attacks in federal facilities must include the surrounding environment from which crime comes.

This recognition by Congress fueled P.L. 102-397, a bill I was able to get Congress to pass in 1992, that allows the Capitol Police to patrol in the areas around the Capitol to capture crime before it made its way there. The bill represented a new departure, by permitting the Capitol Police to patrol outside grounds and the first few blocks around the Capitol. This legislation did no more than provide for greater utilization of a well-trained police force to protect Members of Congress and visitors by assuring they are not crime victims as they come or leave the congressional campus. Simultaneously, sections of the Capitol Hill community, where crime has always been high, also received some protection in addition to hard pressed Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) officers, who must take calls from throughout a larger area.

What I learned from the Capitol Police bill led me to try to do the same in order to improve utilization of federal police officers around other federal facilities. I discovered 30 federal law enforcement agencies here attached to federal agencies, with authority to carry weapons and make arrests but were unable to perform traditional police services, even traffic control, surrounding their immediate locations. Federal agency police often called MPD or even 911 to report crimes or to handle traffic accidents that occurred just outside the agencies. Federal officers who made an occasional arrest merely handed over the suspect to the MPD and did not even do the paperwork, leaving the beleaguered MPD with hours of processing that keeps officers off our high-crime neighborhood streets. Yet Federal Protective Service officers get state-of-the-art training at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC) in Brunswick, Georgia. This state of affairs is why Congress passed the District of Columbia Police Coordination Act in 2001 which provides for cooperative agreements with the MPD. It assists the MPD in crime prevention and law enforcement activities in the

District, including patrolling areas surrounding their respective agencies, sharing and donating equipment and supplies, sharing radio frequencies, and streamlining the processing of suspects. The federal police attached to agencies in this city enthusiastically embraced the opportunity to do the policing that can prevent crime near their federal facility before it makes its way inside. The policing by federal agencies did not involve going outside their federal mandate because the crime they were preventing came from the District and thus both the federal government and the District of Columbia were simultaneously served.

I believe we must look for similar natural synergies between federal and District of Columbia crime prevention strategies particularly post 9-11, when public safety and security strategies often are or should be the same or similar. The District has more federal and local police combined per capita than any jurisdiction in the United States. The nation's capital is saturated with federal and local police, but historically has had one of the highest crime rates in the United States. All told, there are at least 60 police forces within our boundaries, a spectacular number in light of the amount of crime here. I have just come from a hearing where representatives of some of these police, the U.S. Park Police, the Federal Protective Service, U.S. Navy Police and U.S. Army Police, all of them civilian federal police forces in the District, testified. They are a wasted federal asset that is not even coordinated for federal security purposes.

I would like to suggest three ways in which the federal agencies can be helpful within their present federal jurisdiction. First I have asked the Capitol Police Board for temporary assistance during the evening hours in response to five muggings and assaults on the National Mall during May and July, a mission that would be a natural extension of the Capitol Police mission to protect Members of Congress and visitors to the Capitol. Overwhelmingly, the victims of the recent attacks have been visitors to the nation's capital, not D.C. residents. Most of the visitors to the Mall visit the Capitol and are constituents of Members of the House and Senate. Congress has an obligation to do all that we can to ensure that these visitors are as safe when they leave the Capitol and visit federal property just a few blocks away as they are on the Capitol grounds at least temporarily. The Park Police is being forced to borrow Park Police from in the District, Maryland and Virginia, areas that are more dangerous than the Mall, a strategy almost guaranteed to contribute to the District's crime emergency. Protecting the Mall must not come at the expense of Park Police jurisdiction in Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia such as Anacostia Park, as I discovered when I have visited on the Mall at night. We cannot justify borrowing Park Police from park areas in the District, which is already undergoing a crime emergency, or from the region, while the Capitol Police continue to operate exclusively only within its small, albeit important, jurisdiction.

Second the Office of the U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia, whose work load overwhelmingly involves local D.C. cases and who acts as the local D.A., has only a few investigators unlike similar offices. Consequently, MPD officers are taken off the streets where most of the crime occurs for work that would normally be handled by criminal staff investigators. These officers are required to be in court on the day the case is called and until it is called, even though it may not be called, depending upon the length of the prior proceedings, and then must be paid at overtime rates, resulting in huge, unnecessary personnel costs to the District-at least some of which should go directly to public safety. Beginning the process of supplying the needed complement of investigators for the Office of the U.S. Attorney of the District of Columbia would have the immediate effect of putting more officers on the street. I have asked my friend Frank Wolf (R-VA), Chairman of the Science, State, Justice, Commerce and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee, who had indicated his concern with crime even before the crime emergency here, to consider helping with this vital measure.

Third I am asking the U.S. Attorney to call in the Federal Protective Service and the federal agencies that have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with MPD to patrol outside of their respective jurisdictions. I am asking him to determine the extent to which these patrols have been occurring and the results. I have a pending request before the Government Reform Committee for a hearing on the Office of the U.S. Attorney, where the effect of these federal agency patrols will be of interest.

There is a great deal that needs to be done. However I have confined these recommendations to actions that make a difference and that meet three tests: 1) that they are measurable; 2) that they can be implemented immediately or almost immediately; and 3) that they do not require major new financial resources.

